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O 121502Z JUN 07
FM AMEMBASSY MASERU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3041
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
RUEHMR/AMEMBASSY MASERU 3413

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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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DEPT ALSO FOR AF/S
DEPT ALSO FOR DS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [ASEC](#) [LT](#)
SUBJECT: LESOTHO: GUNMEN FORCIBLY DISARM MINISTERIAL GUARDS

REF: A) MASERU 337; B) MASERU 94; C) MASERU 178

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On the night of June 10, unknown gunmen carrying automatic rifles attacked, disarmed, and kidnapped Lesotho Defense Forces (LDF) guards at the residences of the Minister in the Prime Minister's Office Motloheloa Phooko and the Minister of Trade and Industry Popane Lebesa. No shots were fired, though at least one soldier sustained a minor head injury. The army and police are investigating the matter. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) On the night of June 10, four to five gunmen attacked, disarmed, and kidnapped LDF guards at the residences of the Minister in the Prime Minister's Office Motloheloa Phooko and the Minister of Trade and Industry Popane Lebesa. The gunmen were reported to have taken four Israeli-made Galilee automatic rifles from the guards at both residences. (NOTE: The Galilee rifle is a standard issue weapon for the Lesotho Defense Forces. END NOTE.) According to one report, the attackers stated that they had come to kill the ministers, but abandoned that plan once they were incorrectly told by the guards that the ministers were not at home. It is still not clear how the attackers were able to carry out their attack without a single shot being fired. At least one soldier is reported to have sustained a minor head injury after being struck by a rifle.

¶3. (U) Post received a public statement from the Lesotho Defense Forces (LDF) Public Affairs Office on June 12 regarding the incidents at the homes of Minister Phooko and Minister Lebesa. The statement reads:

BEGIN TEXT:

The Lesotho Defense Force Public Affairs Office (LDF-PAO) informs the public that on the night of 10th June 2007, soldiers on guard at the Honorable Ministers' homes were attacked. They were at the residences of the Honorable Minister of Trade and Industry, Cooperatives and Marketing, Mr. Popane Lebesa, and the Honorable Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, Dr. Motloheloa Phooko.

No lives were lost at these attacks but some soldiers sustained minor injuries. Investigations regarding these incidents are in progress, but for security reasons, reports in full details will

be issued when the investigations are completed.

For more information contact: LDF Public Affairs Officer +
(266) 22-320-404

END TEXT.

14. (SBU) COMMENT: According to sources, four to five gunmen took part in these attacks. Understandably, this incident has embarrassed members of the security establishment and shocked the public at large. A source at the LDF Commander's Office told Emboff that the gunmen, after seizing the LDF guards' rifles by force, marched the soldiers outside the residences and warned them to stop working as guards for ministers. The attackers also stated to the guards that they were not targets of the attack. Local speculation has centered on the supposition that only individuals with military experience could carry out such an attack. Although motives for these attacks are unknown, they are eerily similar to assaults in 2006 and earlier in 2007 against residences owned by other members of the GOL cabinet (reftels). END COMMENT.

MURPHY